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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

16 December 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Soviet Policy in the Berlin Crisis

A. BACKGROUND OF THE SOVIET MOVE

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1. Moscow's move to precipitate a crisis over Berlin at this time is, we believe, another manifestation of a hardening tendency in Soviet foreign policy and of the Soviets' growing confidence in the general strength of the Bloc's position vis-a-vis the Western Powers. Khrushchev apparently genuinely believes that Soviet weapons advances and economic successes, coupled with what he regards as signs of increasing weakness and disunity in the West, are shifting the world balance of power. The strength of this conviction, frequently expressed in recent Communist pronouncements, is evident from the willingness to reopen the issue of Berlin; the Soviet leader must be aware that there is virtually no point of controversy between East and West on which the West has so thoroughly committed itself, and that there can scarcely be a more dangerous international issue to push to the point of crisis.

2. We do not believe, however, that the more assertive tone of Soviet foreign policy in general and the Soviet move on Berlin indicate

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any greater Soviet willingness deliberately to risk general war. The Soviets have almost certainly not intended to give the crisis the character of a military showdown but have intended to develop it in political terms. Thus Moscow will seek to avoid placing itself in any position from which it must either backdown completely or resort to military force. Nevertheless, the Soviets probably now believe that the West itself is less disposed to run substantial risk of war and that therefore the West is more likely to give into pressure. Soviet willingness to raise the issue at this time probably reflects this view.

PRINCIPAL SOVIET OBJECTIVES

3. Success in a move against Berlin would serve simultaneously a number of Soviet objectives, some bearing on the consolidation of the Communist position in Eastern Europe, some on the weakening of the Allied position in Germany and Western Europe generally. These objectives include:

a. To remove the threat which West Berlin represents to the internal security of the GDR regime by eliminating Western authority from the city.

b. To gain at least de facto Western recognition of the "sovereignty" of the German Democratic Republic and thereby acceptance of the Soviet view that the eventual reunification of Germany is a problem for the two German states.

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c. To move the West toward acceptance of the USSR's version of the status quo in Eastern Europe.

d. To foster discord among the NATO states, to reduce West German confidence in its allies, and to encourage Bonn to seek a separate deal with the USSR on the German problem.

e. To use the Berlin crisis to move toward a German settlement which would include West Germany's withdrawal from NATO and limitations on its armaments.

4. The first three of these objectives are concerned with consolidating the Communist position in Eastern Europe, a problem which has preoccupied the Soviets during the past year. The internal security of the GDR has been an increasingly troublesome problem, which has been pointed up in recent months by the flight of professional personnel through West Berlin. If the Western Powers could be persuaded to withdraw their forces from Berlin, the GDR authorities would be able to choke off the refugee flow and reduce the political challenge which West Berlin has presented the GDR. Together with Western recognition of East Germany, these developments would significantly reinforce the Soviet position in Eastern Europe by giving permanence and stability to the weakest and most exposed of the satellite regimes, and by greatly reducing the chances of revolt.

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5. At the same time, and by the same measures, the Soviet leaders aim to undermine the Allied position in Western Europe. They probably believe that they can use a Berlin crisis to exploit latent differences among the Allies concerning the recognition of the GDR. They hope to estrange the Federal Republic from its allies, since Western recognition of the GDR would convince large sections of German opinion that the West was retreating from the position it had hitherto taken on reunification. The Soviet leaders probably believe that any apparent failure of the Bonn Government to maintain close association with the Western great powers would undermine its domestic position, spread feelings of helplessness and isolation among the West German population, and lead to broader support for an attempt to explore the possibility of a separate deal with the USSR on the German problem. If such tendencies became dominant in West Germany, the collapse of NATO and its defense structure would be in sight.

POSSIBLE COURSES OF SOVIET ACTION

6. The Soviets probably did not expect Western acceptance of their 27 November proposal to make Berlin a "free city". They probably foresee some form of negotiations with the allies before they turn over to the East Germans control over Western access to Berlin. However, it is possible that in certain eventualities, such as an outright Western

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refusal to enter into negotiations, the Soviets would take this step before the expiration of the six month's "grace" period stipulated in their note. At any stage of the crisis, of course, they may threaten to make such a move in order to put pressure on the Allies. But, on the whole, we believe it unlikely that they will actually make a precipitate move, regardless of initial Western responses.

7. The Soviets probably now anticipate a Western proposal to discuss Berlin within the context of the entire German problem. We do not think that such a proposal would be greeted with outright Soviet rejection but would probably be met with counteroffers designed to exploit any show of allied indecision generated by the Berlin crisis.

8. At least initially, any such counteroffers would center around the traditional Soviet scheme for German reunification, i.e., a confederation of East and West Germany as worked out by the two states concerned. Coupled to this would probably be a reiteration of the Soviet "package plan" for a general European settlement which would include such proposals as an East-West nonaggression pact, some form of European disarmament and disengagement, such as the Rapacki Plan, and a cessation of nuclear testing.

9. In making such proposals the Soviets estimate that certain sectors of European opinion will react favorably to those features of their

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proposals which provide for military disengagement -- withdrawal of forces and banning of nuclear weapons from Central Europe -- to appeal to many who regard the presence of nuclear-equipped forces of both sides in Germany as a main cause of tension and war danger. They will hold out the prospect to the Socialists in West Germany that further progress toward unification will be possible once Soviet proposals have brought a general easing of the tensions which surround the German problem. By appeals of this kind to various elements of opinion in Europe, they will try to make it as difficult as possible for the Western European Powers to reject their proposals altogether.

10. We believe it likely that at some moment which the Soviets judge favorable they will again bring forward a dramatic proposal for a summit meeting on the whole array of issues which will have been raised. The moment chosen for this move will be one at which tensions are high over the prospect of a deadlock, and at which the Soviets might consider opinion in the West to be deeply divided over the next steps. The kind of summit meeting the Soviets would then try to set up would be one in which the Western Powers could be brought to accept agreements which, although they would be trumpeted as a great advance for "peace," would in fact amount to acceptance of the main Soviet terms.

11. Whether or not a summit meeting develops, either to stimulate further negotiations on Germany as a whole or to overcome a deadlock,

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the Soviets will probably attach new features to ~~their~~ free city proposals to make it more attractive to Western opinion. They may, for example, offer to include East Berlin in a free and neutralized city. They may also offer to place access to the city under formal UN guarantees, perhaps with UN observers present in the city and on access routes. Such an offer would almost certainly still be conditional on the continuation of a Communist government in the Eastern sector, an end to the East German refugee flow through West Berlin, and a cessation of Allied "subversive" and intelligence activities in the city.

12. We thus believe that Soviet tactics will retain some flexibility, the better to take advantage of the situation as it develops. However, Soviet opposition to German reunification on any basis other than confederation and the continued existence of a Communist East Germany will be in the background of all Soviet maneuvers. The Soviet leaders almost certainly do not contemplate relinquishing control over East Germany because of the threat such action would pose to their whole position in Eastern Europe, beginning with Poland.

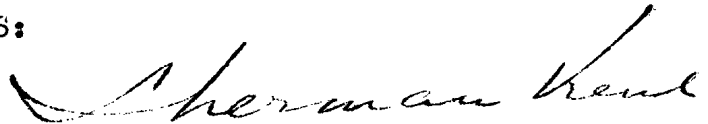
13. If the Soviets fail to make any significant progress in talks with the Allies, they will sooner or later have to face up to the question of fulfilling their announced intention to turn over to East Germany their controls over access to West Berlin. Their decision will be greatly

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affected by the Soviet assessment of the degree of ~~tension~~ which had developed and the firmness of Western attitudes at the time, and it is possible that the Soviet leaders might decide to back down under whatever smokescreen of explanation seems most expedient. However, we consider it more likely that the USSR would proceed with the turnover of controls to the East Germany. Although the Soviets probably intend to be cautious, and tactically flexible, their attitude on the Berlin problem appears determined, and the chances of miscalculation leading to armed clashes will be high.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



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